

Second Life Museums & Archeological Modeling

Richard Urban

Graduate School of Library and Information Science
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Michael B. Twidale

Graduate School of Library and Information Science
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Paul Marty

School of Information
Florida State University

Museums have been exploring the use of multi-user virtual environments (MUVE) for more than a decade, often in the form of proprietary virtual worlds built for select audiences such as teachers and students. Since launching in 2003, the online virtual community of Second Life (<http://www.secondlife.com>) has attracted over one million dedicated 'residents' who are laying the foundations for widespread adoption of MUVE. In many ways, the growth of MUVE mirrors the growth of the Web. New technologies transition from small scale prototypes constructed by researchers at great expense to large scale, rapidly growing mainstream products and services available to the general public. These products are not only used by many people, but are co-created by them. With the Web this was a matter of using hypertext to create websites, initially inspired by various genres of print media, and soon evolving their own genres. In the case of MUVE like Second Life (SL), residents can create 3D artifacts, buildings, and social spaces where people interact. The social nature of Second Life is a critical component of understanding how it is, can, and should be used.

Already we can see a wide range of museum-like activities occurring in Second Life. A recent survey identified over 150 museums, galleries or museum-like activity spaces in Second Life. These museums offered visitors opportunities to view collections of real-life and fictional spacecraft, digitized versions of real-life artworks, exhibitions of artworks created in Second Life, living history reenactments, or archaeological monuments (Urban, Marty & Twidale, 2007). Reflecting the patterns of development of the early World Wide Web, most of these SL museum spaces have been created by enthusiasts - residents who are not affiliated with real-life museums.

Game studies researchers have suggested that the behaviors of players in other massively multi-player online games (MMOG) such as *World of Warcraft* are blurring the boundaries between work, play and learning (Castronova, 2006; Steinkuehler & Williams, 2006; Yee, 2006). Like other passionate user communities, Second Life residents are turning the virtual world into a 'third place' where they can engage in serious leisure pursuits. Museums and cultural heritage institutions are not unfamiliar with serious leisure as they often engage with amateur archaeologists, natural scientists, living-history re-enactors or family historians. Unlike traditional museum audiences, these individuals are "involved participants rather than consumers" (Orr, 2006; Stebbins, 1992).

The degree to which individual residents decide to place themselves on a continuum from pure work to pure play can affect the results of their activities in Second Life. Some residents seek to evoke a particular historic place, while others engage in the

serious work of conducting research, visiting the real-life places and artifacts upon which their Second Life representations are based. Some residents see Second Life as primarily a social space that requires a lower degree of authenticity and accuracy. As long as the stage can provide the necessary background, it can facilitate social interactions (DiBlas, 2005). Other residents are using Second Life as a new expressive medium that allows them to create new artworks or to accurately represent cultural artifacts as best they can.

As residents create museum-like activities, humanities scholars are exploring Second Life as a virtual classroom. The New Media Consortium (<http://www.nmc.org/sl/>) has constructed a virtual campus where classes are held in "outdoor" amphitheaters, faculty and students are staging plays, poetry readings and providing space for digital artists to create new works. The Stanford Humanities Lab (<http://shl.stanford.edu/>), the Humanities, Arts, Science and Technology Advanced Collaboratory (HASTAC - www.hastac.org/) have also staked some ground in Second Life.

Observations of how Second Life residents are currently engaging in serious leisure activities around museums and archaeological models can inform many kinds of research. We can study the early stages of a new online social medium being co-created and evolving into a new form, just as the early days of the web led to the development of new forms of creating, sharing and manipulating information, including cultural materials. We can also use the work of these technological pioneers to inform ways to create new learning spaces for students. Second Life also affords researchers and students an opportunity to demonstrate what is possible when more rigorous methods are applied. While many projects have created models using highly accurate rendering systems, Second Life can add value to this work by providing tools for social engagement for a broader audience (Di Blas, 2003, 2005; Eiteljorg, 2004). The serious leisure activities of Second Life residents also suggest a more open and inquiry based approach to learning. Instead of presenting students with already completed models, Second Life can engage students through co-creation and collaborative discovery.

This poster will present examples of museum-like spaces and activities taking place in Second Life with a particular focus on archeological-themed representations. It will illustrate how Second Life museums are largely the product of resident's serious leisure activities. Using these activities as an example of what is possible it will explore how early attempts at teaching in Second Life might be informed by resident's serious leisure activities.

References

Castronova, E. (2006) *Synthetic Worlds: The Business and Culture of Online Games*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Di Blas, N. (2003). The SEE Experience: Edutainment in 3D Virtual Worlds. In J. Trant and D. Bearman (Eds.) *Museums and the Web 2003: Select Papers from an International Conference*, Boston. *Archives and Museum Informatics*, 173-182. Retrieved from <http://www.archimuse.com/mw2003/papers/diblas/diblas.html>

Di Blas, N., Gobbo, E. and Paolini, P. (2005) 3D Worlds and Cultural Heritage Realism vs. Virtual Presence. In J. Trant and D. Bearman (Eds.) *Museums and the Web 2005: Proceedings, Toronto. Archives and Museum Informatics*, Retrieved from: <http://www.archimuse.com/mw2005/papers/diBlas.html>

Eiteljorg III, Harrison. (2004) "Computing for Archeologists." In Schreibman, S., Siemens, R. and J. Unsworth, eds. *A Companion to Digital Humanities*. (Malden, MA: Blackwell).

Orr, N. (2006). Museum Volunteering: Heritage as "Serious Leisure" *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 12(2), 192-210.

Stebbins, R.A. (1992). *Amateurs, Professionals and Serious Leisure*. Montreal: Queens University Press.

Steinkuehler, C. & Williams, D. (2006). Where everybody knows your (screen) name: Online games as "third places." [*Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*](#), 11(4), article 1.

Urban, R., Marty, P., & Twidale, M. (forthcoming) A Second Life For Your Museum: 3D Multi-user Virtual Environments and Museums. To appear in *Museums & the Web 2007*.

Yee, N. (2006) The Labor of Fun: How Video Games Blur the Boundaries of Work and Play. *Games and Culture* 1, 68-71. Retrieved from:
<http://www.nickyyee.com/pubs/Yee%20-%20Labor%20of%20Fun%202006.pdf>

Illustration

Themiskyra Throne Room.
<http://slurl.com/secondlife/Themiskyra/81/241/21/>